

Gamma -Leaders

Acts 2b

Study 3 The Gospel and the New Community

Q1. Acts 2:14-36. What does Peter say in response to this first question? This is a gospel presentation — outline its basic points. What kind of impact does this first gospel presentation have on the audience?

Peter now becomes the spokesperson for all the disciples. Some have asked “what is this all about?” It is his job to give an overview of the gospel.

a) vv.14-21. First, Peter begins by talking about the phenomenon that the crowd is noticing — the tongues speaking and the anointed utterance of the disciples. He starts, “*these men are not drunk*” (v.15). Notice, therefore, that his presentation is not so “canned” that he ignores the burning issues of his listeners. His point #1 is their point #1. He starts where they are — he begins by addressing an issue that they are interested in. In this case, Peter starts by quoting from the prophet Joel. Again, we see that he appeals to authorities that the listeners hold to. He knows that, since most of them are Jews and Gentile converts of the diaspora that they will know the prophets. In this first segment, he points out that Joel had predicted a future era in which the Holy Spirit would be poured out, not just on certain leaders like Moses and David, but on everyone, so that the power of the Spirit for ministry and service would be pervasive. He tells them that this is what they now see.

b) Second, Peter shows that the ministry of Christ is what has inaugurated the Spirit. And he covers the following:

v.22. Jesus’ life and ministry. Jesus was a great teacher and a worker of miracles. Peter is brief because, with these hearers anyway, this was not in doubt. (“*as you yourselves know*”) Today, people are very much in doubt as to whether Jesus did the miracles and made the claims that the Bible says he did. But Peter’s crowd knew all this for themselves.

v.23. Jesus' death. Jesus was put to death on the cross. Peter does not say much about how this accomplished salvation — he does not talk about substitution or ransom at this point. But he says it was *by God's set purpose and foreknowledge*. So he is saying that through the cross, God's saving purposes were worked out and came to fruition. The important point here is that Peter reminds them that *"you... put him to death"*. This is what most likely "cuts" them to the heart later (v.37).

v.24-32. Jesus' resurrection. Jesus has been risen from the dead. In this presentation, Peter spends much more time on the resurrection than on the atonement. He shows that the resurrection was predicted by the Old Testament (v.25), and personally witnessed by the apostles (v.32). Peter therefore stresses the historical character and evidence for the resurrection. He evidently believed that the key issue for this crowd was to accept the fact that Jesus was no longer dead.

v.33-36. Jesus exaltation. With another Old Testament quote, Peter lastly tells his hearers that Christ is at the right hand of God, where he is not ruling as Lord of all.

In summary, Peter focuses on two historical events — Christ's death and resurrection. And he appeals to two witnesses — the prophets (Biblical evidence) and the apostles (historical evidence). As we can see, Peter's gospel presentation is simply showing people the life and work of Christ. And also, we see that Peter weaves "apologetics" (evidence) into his gospel presentation.

What kind of impact does this presentation have on the crowd? We are told that they were *"cut to the heart"*. This means that they saw the deep personal relevance, and that they were convicted of their need. Why were they "cut to the heart"? Probably because Paul makes a second reference (see v.22) to the fact that *"you crucified"* him (v.36). We have to look beyond the immediate circumstances to the principle here. Surely, since most of the crowd were people coming to Jerusalem from far away (2:5) and since Jesus had been crucified many weeks ago now, Peter cannot mean that many of the people listening had had a part in literally crucifying Jesus. This is

not an anti-Semitic text saying that “the Jews killed Jesus”. Rather, this is part of the gospel message for every human being. Until we see that our sins cost Jesus his life, that we were the cause of his death — we will not be “cut to the heart”.

Q2. Look at Acts 2: 37-40 and how does Peter tell them to respond to the gospel ? It is two actions

Peter calls on them to do two things. First, he tells them to “*repent*”. The Greek word *metanoia* means a complete change of mind. It is much more than being “sorry” for something. It means to completely change your approach, your foundation, your mind. Necessarily involved in “repentance” is “faith”. Peter does not tell them to “believe in Jesus”, but we know that they did (v.44 calls them “*believers*”). It is impossible to really repent without believing, for to turn from sin and the old way of thinking entails turning to God and a new way of thinking. You can’t “change your mind” about Jesus without doing both together. We will see that in the future, the apostles “counsel into Christ” by sometimes saying “repent and believe” or just “believe” or (here) just “repent”. But the two are always connected, even when not stated.

The second thing he tells them is to “*be baptized*”. This was a remarkable thing to ask of Jews. Jews believed Gentile converts needed to be baptized, because they saw the Gentiles as being spiritually unclean. Now Peter says that every one who wishes to be a Christian needs to be baptized — and to do it in the name of the one that previously had been rejected. That would be a public sign in the strongest terms that they had repented — had completely changed their minds about who Jesus was. It is important to realize why in this situation Peter would lift up baptism as being so important as a sign of their repentance.

Some churches have taken Acts 2:38 as being a complete guide to salvation. Since Peter says that they must be repent and be baptized, it is inferred that water baptism is necessary to receive forgiveness of sins. The problem with this interpretation is that it makes Acts 2:38 contradict all of Romans and Galatians, where Paul adamantly insists that no act of obedience receives salvation — only faith in

Christ does. So how do we understand Acts 2:38 so that it does not undermine all that the rest of the NT tells us? We must see that Peter is saying that repentance (and its flip side, faith) are signified in baptism. If we didn't have the rest of the New Testament, it could be very possible to conclude that Peter is saying that repentance/faith and baptism are both pre-requisites or receptors of salvation. But we do have the rest of the New Testament. Also, if we realize the context and the situation on that day, we can see why Peter would have so strongly pressed them to be baptized immediately as a sign that they as Jews had completely changed their minds about Christ.

Also, Peter tells them that if they repent/believe — they will receive two promises. They will receive “*forgiveness of sins*” and “*the gift of the Holy Spirit*”. This is a great summary of what it means to become a Christian. When we become a Christian, there is something legal that happens outside of us — we are accepted as sinless and perfect, our record being pardoned and covered. Secondly, there is something that happens within us — we get the new life, a new power and Spirit directly from God that then grows in us.

In summary.

“Here then is... the message. Two events (Christ's death and resurrection) as attested by two witnesses ([the Bible and historical witnesses to resurrection]), on the basis of which God makes two promises (forgiveness and the Spirit), on two conditions (repentance and faith)... We have no liberty to amputate this apostolic gospel...”

– John Stott, *The Message of Acts*, p. 81.

Q3. Acts 2:42-47. Make a list of the characteristics and functions of the early church which are evident in this passage.

This list can be broken down in many ways. I will make a longer list here — it helps to see the richness of the passage. Then in the next study questions, we will try to organize the characteristics and ministries under four headings. For now — just brainstorm. Here are a series of insights. There are surely others.

a) The church trained and educated its members. (“*devoted*

themselves to the apostles' teaching" v.42a).

- A. b) The church brought its members together constantly — “*every day*” (v.46)! They couldn’t stay away from each other.
- B. c) The church moved members into relationships of mutual support and fellowship (“*they were together*” v.44a; “*the fellowship*” v.42b).
- C. d) The church had both small group meetings (“*they broke bread in their homes*” v.46b) and large group meetings (“*continued to meet together in the temple courts*” v.46a).
- D. e) The church practiced the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper constantly. (The term “*the breaking of bread*” in v.42 and v.46 is thought by most scholars to be a description of a meal together at which the Lord’s Supper was observed. The key indicator that this is the meaning of the phrase is the word “*the*” before the “*breaking of bread*”.)
- E. f) The church spent much time in group prayer (“*devoted themselves... to prayer*” v.42d) which occurred, evidently in both homes and large public gatherings.
- F. g) The church practiced radical stewardship, economic sharing and “mercy ministry” at least within the community. People got practical financial and material help for their needs (“*Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.*” v.45).
- G. h) There were deeds of power which accompanied and verified the truth of the apostles’ preaching (“*many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles*” v.43.)
- H. i) There was a general spirit of joy (“*glad and sincere hearts*” v.46) and praise (“*praising God*” v.47a) which permeated every meeting at every level.
- I. j) This community life was extraordinarily attractive to outsiders (“*enjoying the favor of all the people*” v.47).
- J. k) The church was evangelistically effective in the extreme, with new conversions everyday. (“*The Lord added... daily those who*

were being saved.” v.47)

Q 4. The five ministries of the early church are also five “vital signs” of a Spirit-filled community.

A. Ministry of learning in the truth. (1st sign: Theological depth)

B. Ministry of loving in the fellowship. (2nd sign: Intimate relationships)

C. Ministry of worship in the Spirit. (3rd sign: Joyous worship)

D. Ministry of witness through words. (4th sign: Relentless evangelism)

E. Ministry of service through deeds. (5th sign: Sacrificial service)

Consider your own small group. How can it better manifest these ‘vital signs’? Consider your local church. How can it better manifest these ‘vital signs’?

The discussion will of course be different for every small group. In general, the same “vital signs” should exist at the small group level as well as the large group level. But consider this. No one small group and no one local congregation represents the whole Body of Christ. We know that spiritual gifts differ (I Cor. 12-14). Therefore, it is not likely that any one grouping of Christians will be able to do all of these five things equally well or intensely. It is right and fair for a particular group to major in Bible study, so its time for fellowship, worship, and witness is lessened. Other groups might major in fellowship/accountability, giving less time to study, and so on. But no group should completely ignore any of these vital signs, if it wants to stay vital!

The same is true for local churches. Virtually every church will be stronger at some of these functions because of the gifts and calling of the leaders. But we cannot ignore any of them. How do you think Redeemer does at this? If there are members of other

churches in your group, let them use this grid to understand the strengths and weaknesses of those churches. Don't let this become a gripe session, however. Use this outline to pray for the churches and to consider ways to help them grow up into the New Testament pattern

THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL

Introduction

In Acts 2:37, we see an example of the Spirit convicting the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8-11) as Peter spoke to the crowd at Pentecost. He was preaching the gospel boldly. We can too. (Leader: Look up each verse under I - 10 minutes, II - 15 minutes, III - 10 minutes and discuss the questions. Pace yourself to leave 10 to 15 minutes to read number IV and pray.)

- K. Understanding where the power lies.**
 - A. Romans 1:16** – What are we told about the gospel? How does this verse challenge our attitude about witnessing and to whom we witness?
 - B. I Corin. 1:17,18 & 22-24** – What was Paul's central message to the Greeks at Corinth, in spite of their intellects, morals and philosophies?
 - C. I Corin. 2:1-5** – How did Paul proclaim the gospel that he said he was not ashamed of and what comfort does this offer to us?
- L. Accepting the ministry God gave us.**
 - A. II Corin. 5:17-20** – What is God's messenger called? What specifically does he do? Where does he get his authority? What does God's messenger talk about? What's the message? How would you define '*reconcile*'? In this passage, who is reaching out to whom?
 - B.** Who have you had an opportunity to share this message with lately and how did they respond?
- M. Because of the power of the Holy Spirit and the power of the gospel, the lives of many people were touched. We should be able to experience increasing confidence in communicating the gospel, as we continue to contemplate what it means to build an altar, make sacrifices to the Lord, and trust the Holy Spirit to let the fire fall into our hearts as we live for Him in word and deed.**

A. PRAY FOR OPPORTUNITIES this week to practice being a minister of reconciliation. It is the God empowered ministry that has been given to each believer! Accept it joyfully.

B. ALTAR Accountability. During closing time of sharing and prayer — in the larger group, or in smaller groups of 2 or 3, ask each other and share: “How are you doing with the 3-5 things that you resolved to do in order to “build and altar” and have a life more useful to God?”